CLASSIFICATION [redacted]
Security Information

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
INFORMATION FROM
FOREIGN DOCUMENTS OR RADIO BROADCASTS

REPORT NO. [redacted]

CD NO.

COUNTRY USSR

SUBJECT RADIO MOSCOW'S COMMENT ON ATOMIC ISSUES *

HOW PUBLISHED

WHERE PUBLISHED

DATE PUBLISHED

LANGUAGE

DATE OF INFORMATION 6 August 1945–20 November 1951

DATE DIST. 3 Dec. 1951

NO. OF PAGES 4

SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO.

THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION

SOURCE Monitored Broadcasts

ABSTRACT

Radio Moscow's continuing and prevailing concern in references to atomic weapons is to present the USSR as the champion of peace; the drive to have atomic weapons banned is one aspect of this presentation. The U.S. position, which allegedly dictates the position of all the bourgeois nations, is said to be exactly the opposite. This white-black dichotomy is characteristic of all Soviet radio propaganda; but it appears with particular clarity in propaganda concerning atomic weapons. Again and again Moscow baldly reiterates that the Soviet Union is for banning the bomb, the United States is not.

There are several indications of marked sensitivity about the entire atomic issue. The deliberate avoidance of detailed discussion is one; the low volume of attention is another. (There has been appreciable attention to atomic issues only during U.N. debates and in the two weeks following Stalin's 6 October interview in PRAVDA.) Another indicator is the relative absence of scaremongering over the dreadful consequences of atomic warfare. Such scaremongering occurs rarely and only in broadcasts to a restricted group of audiences.

It may be that this sensitivity reflects concern over a Soviet-estimated disproportion in current East-West atomic potentials. If this is the case, Moscow's propaganda may change as the Soviet potential is enlarged.

Although a departure from previous propaganda in some minor ways, Stalin's interview in PRAVDA was generally consistent with Soviet propaganda on this and other issues. The interview added luster to the USSR's facade of peace, it initiated a new phase in East-West propaganda relations (in itself of intrinsic value in a propaganda war), and it gave the superficial appearance of reopening the way to East-West negotiations. If the U.S. were to have accepted Stalin's implicit offer, which involved little deviation from previously-stated Soviet terms, the resulting negotiations would presumably have tended to reduce popular Western anxieties, at least for the moment. This in turn might have resulted in a temporary relaxation of Western efforts to build up military strength, hence in effect obstructing this Western program. If the negotiations proved fruitless, the Soviets would be in a position to make propaganda capital of the fact by pointing out that the Soviet terms, on which the negotiations were based, had again been rejected by the United States. And even if no negotiations were anticipated by Stalin, it might have been his expectation that the apparent offer to negotiate and the U.S. refusal to accept would tend to create Western doubts and confusion about American motivations. In other words, it is probable that obstruction of the American-led drive for Western military strength and unity was one of the objectives of the interview—just as it is of much of Moscow's current effort.

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* This report incorporates some material which has been presented in previous FBIS publications.

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Soviet radio propaganda concerning atomic weapons, whether related to Stalin's PRAVDA interview, the Hiroshima anniversary, or the several U.N. discussions of this issue, reveals certain basic characteristics. These are:

1. Low volume of comment.
2. The absence of any specific or concrete discussion of atomic weapons, of the direct consequences of atomic warfare, or of the detailed problems of international control.
3. Insistent emphasis on the slogan-like axiom that the bomb must be banned, not merely regulated.
4. Limited efforts to scaremonger. (This is a natural consequence of the failure to elaborate on the effects of atomic warfare; but this in turn appears to reflect a decision to avoid this type of propaganda except on special occasions and for limited audiences.)
5. Thorough-going concentration on establishing the Soviet Union as the sponsor of world peace. This concentration prevails in much of Moscow's radio propaganda, but appears to be especially marked in comment on the atomic weapons issue.

1. Limited Volume

Moscow's references to atomic weapons have been limited in volume ever since the issue was brought to prominence with the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima. At that time Soviet propagandists confined themselves to occasional broadcasts minimizing the military significance of the bomb and touching on the need for international control of atomic energy.

In the six years since Hiroshima, total attention to atomic issues has been but a small part of Moscow's total comment on foreign or domestic affairs. The question has received marked attention during United Nations deliberations on atomic questions (Moscow consistently capitalizes on world news events), and after Stalin's recent PRAVDA interview.* But in the months when no such event is being publicized, references to atomic issues are few and far between. President Truman's 1949 announcement about an atomic explosion in the USSR was reported in a TASS statement that was broadcast only 40 times--or approximately once in each of Moscow's foreign-language transmissions. The Eniwetok and Nevada tests have been pointedly ignored.** Reports of a third atomic explosion in the USSR have never been acknowledged.

This low volume of attention is in marked contrast to Moscow's treatment of other issues involved in Two-Camp relations. For example, the militarization of Western Germany has consistently received voluminous attention; the organization of NATO and the establishment of American bases in Western Europe have been publicized throughout most of 1951; and the alleged remilitarization of Japan has been denounced in appreciable volume. This contrast suggests that the atomic bomb has a special place on Moscow's propaganda agenda--namely, it is exploited when world developments bring it to the forefront or when Soviet initiative can be claimed.

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* Even in this instance, however, the high volume of attention was not sustained. The peak of attention to the 6 October PRAVDA interview was reached in the period 9 to 15 October when exploitation of the interview amounted to 23% of the total comment on foreign affairs. In the two weeks following, attention to atomic issues dropped to 12 and 2 percent, respectively. This pattern of attention closely resembles that for Stalin's February interview in PRAVDA; and this similarity suggests that much of the attention to the atom interview was related to the basic requirement of publicizing the words of "the Great Leader."

** The only reference to date to the current Nevada tests occurred in Ilya Ehrenburg's 15 November PRAVDA article on the COLLIER'S issue, "The War We Do Not Want." Ehrenburg asserted that American diplomats ignore these Nevada tests when they talk of peace in Paris. But, true to the general pattern, he gave no details of the tests. Furthermore he acknowledges the COLLIER'S references to destruction of Soviet facilities but does not explain, in the broadcast version of the PRAVDA article, how that destruction was brought about. It appears that Ehrenburg is allowed certain liberties not given other Soviet commentators for he alone has mentioned such things as atomic submarines--a subject on which Moscow has been completely silent otherwise.

2. Avoidance of Detail

Moscow's comment on atomic issues has also been characterized by a marked absence of details--whether on the use of atomic weapons or on the plans for regulation. The destructiveness of the bombs dropped in Japan was not touched upon until Molotov, in the October Revolution anniversary speech of 1945, mentioned "the tremendous destructive power" of the atomic bomb; previous broadcasts had tended to minimize its military significance. In general Soviet broadcasters have not elaborated on Molotov's simple statement. There have been occasional remarks concerning the destruction of civilians (these are most often broadcast to Japan, and even then they constitute a very small segment of the total comment) and the first comment on the COLLIER'S issue of 27 October made such an allusion. Otherwise, however, there has been a strict avoidance of any details concerning the effectiveness or consequences of atomic warfare.

This avoidance of detail also applies to the question of developments in atomic tactics and strategy; a recent PRAVDA article spoke of atomic artillery but did not define or illustrate the term, or discuss the tactical problems involved. There has never been a reference to radiation or to defenses against the unique impact of atomic warfare. (The raid tests in American schools have been scorned as hysterical, but have not been described in any identifiable detail).

Reports of U.N. deliberations on atomic issues have also been lacking in specific detail. Comment on the 1948 deliberations of the U.N. commission on atomic energy control echoed Gromyko's somewhat confusing statements, gave only a hazy idea of the American position, and generally adhered to the practice of leading unwary listeners to conclude that only the USSR sincerely fought for peace and true control. A similar pattern prevailed during subsequent General Assembly discussions. Andrei Vishinsky's remarks were publicized--but not always in the detail in which he spoke, especially on the question of inspection. As was true before these debates, and as has been true since, Moscow did not give any detailed information on the various control proposals. The Baruch plan is rejected, without analysis or examination, because it furthers the profits of American monopolists.

In seeming compensation for the lack of detail noted above, Moscow is vociferous in its demands that the bomb be banned. Mere regulation is held insufficient and unacceptable--because it serves the monopolists' warmongering purposes. (The shift in Soviet policy from demands that all bombs be destroyed to Stalin's demand that existing bombs be used for peaceful purposes--which may reflect the change in the Soviet potential--has never been acknowledged per se. It has not been discussed in post-Stalin comment.)

Thus Moscow, substituting generalized harangues for detailed argument, insists that the bomb must be banned if peace is to be secured. As in much of Moscow's propaganda, no shadings of viewpoint are acknowledged. The ban is held to be axiomatic for peace; and the peace lovers are ranged behind it while the warmongers are lined up in opposition.

3. Scaremongering

In general, Moscow avoids explicit scaremongering concerning atomic weapons. Although such scaremongering may be considered implicit in any reference to atomic weapons, Moscow rarely engages in deliberate formulations which would tend to panic its listeners. Such explicit scaremongering as does occur is usually related to specific events, e.g., the Hiroshima anniversary which Moscow commemorates by reminding the Japanese of the suffering they have endured. The recent COLLIER'S issue on "The War We Do Not Want" has been exploited in a commentary pointing out that the editors relish the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians. This has been broadcast only to limited audiences; and it did not appear in Home Service transmissions. Stalin's announcement that other bombs would be exploded is also implicit scaremongering; but to the extent that it prepares the Soviet home audience and the Communist world for future tests it could also have the effect of reducing Soviet-Orbit fear.

There have been general charges of atomic diplomacy and of American efforts to threaten or blackmail via its atomic weapons. These charges have been more frequent since Stalin's interview; but they are often surrounded by compensatory generalities regarding peace-camp strength, i.e., ability to resist such threats.

There have also been occasional attempts to warn that the Americans plan to use atomic bombs in the Korean war or against Chinese cities, but these have been rare, unelaborate, and limited in volume. Furthermore, President Truman's 30 November 1950 announcement that he alone would decide whether to use such bombs in Korea--which could conceivably have been exploited for scaremongering propaganda of the most overt sort--was almost ignored.

4. Sensitivity

The general pattern of Soviet comment--low volume, avoidance of details, relative failure to exploit scaremongering possibilities--suggests Soviet sensitivity to the whole issue. Moscow may fear that discussions of atomic warfare would panic the Soviet audience. The pattern also suggests concern over the disproportion in East-West supplies and potentials. For this reason it might be expected that the propaganda patterns will change when the Soviet supply is enlarged. This possible change is also suggested by the shift from the demands that all bombs be destroyed to the demand, expressed by Stalin, that existing bombs be used for peaceful purposes.

5. The Stalin Interview

Radio Moscow's comment on the Stalin interview of 6 October highlighted the strength of the Communist camp and the possibility of negotiations leading to the prohibition of atomic weapons. To a lesser degree, both in terms of volume and distribution of comment, Moscow engaged in qualified scaremongering concerning atomic weapons by charging that America is engaging in atomic scaremongering. The PRAVDA reference to "atomic artillery," noted above, was the major departure from the previous avoidance of any sort of detail in references to atomic weapons. Otherwise Soviet broadcasters generalized on Stalin's words and did not spell out any of the implications.

Exploitation of the interview followed familiar patterns; first the interview itself was rehashed, then world speculation on the significance of the interview was reviewed; in these reviews emphasis was placed on the peace elements and on the implicit hint at negotiations. Then Moscow rebuked the Western press for distorting or ignoring the interview. After this, the interview was allowed to disappear except for almost formalistic references in comment on other issues.

The interview and the subsequent propaganda seemed to serve a number of propaganda purposes; they answered President Truman's statement that the Soviets are talking peace while preparing for war, they rationalized Soviet atomic experiments and the Soviet-led "peace campaign," and they bolstered Communist confidence in Communist strength. The incident was given special publicity in broadcasts to North America--as part of the continuing effort to evoke popular dissatisfaction with official policies. By raising the possibility of reopened negotiations it challenged the unity of the Western nations, especially in quarters where that unity appears to be based primarily on anti-Sovietism.

The strength implications of the interview and the subsequent propaganda are, of course, tantamount to scaremongering insofar as they constitute flexing of the atomic muscles. However, these implications have political as well as military significance; Moscow may be seeking to persuade listeners that it is leading from a position of strength and, in fact, is forcing the Western powers to negotiate.

Finally, the interview appeared partially designed to offset recent Western moves to seize the peace-propaganda initiative.

The fact that the Stalin interview brought no substantive change in Soviet references to the atom bomb is clearly shown in Beriya's address on the 6 November anniversary of the October Revolution; in that address the word atom appeared only once--in a recapitulation of Soviet proposals before the United Nations. Beriya made passing reference to "fantastic projectiles" but did not otherwise allude to the subject of atomic weapons or atomic warfare.